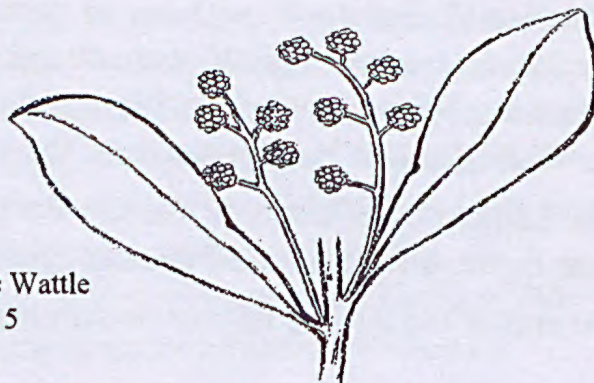


Castlemaine Naturalist

August 2005

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Sporadic Wattle
see page 5



Excursion to Inglewood 9/7/05.

Leader: Ern Perkins

It was a cold bleak day as our small group set off with a comprehensive guide that enabled us to keep a watch out for various points of interest on the way.

Although the sun was shining at the Dunolly School where we walked the Fitness Trail circuit, some members were seen hurdling, performing on balance beams and even doing push-ups in order to warm up. Yellow Gums (*Eucalyptus leucoxylon* ssp *pruinosa*) and Spreading Wattle (*Acacia genistifolia*) were all that was in flower. We looked for Blue-faced Honeyeaters that were sighted here some years ago but to no avail.

The Waanyarra Cemetery was a highlight. Many very old graves scattered throughout the grounds have been marked with uniform miniature headstones that show how numerous these old burial sites are at a glance. A couple of family plots have beautifully crafted original old post and rail and picket fence surrounds with carefully carved wooden headstones – one marking the resting place of young Jesse Turner was dated 1867. Situated in Grey Box woodland, there were masses of Flame Heath (*Asroloma conostephioides*) in full bloom as well as some Urn Heath (*Melichrus urceolatus*) and Cranberry Heath (*Astroloma humifusum*). There were signs of Twining Fringe Lily (*Thysanotus patersonii*), Dwarf Greenhoods (*Pterostylis nana*) and also a new acacia for me – Mallee Wattle (*A. montana*).

On the outskirts of Tarnagulla we were privileged to visit the remains of the old bush home and garden of Joy Weatherall's taxidermist uncle, where she enjoyed childhood holidays surrounded by all sorts of old tools and furniture of a past era – sadly now all gone. Some of Mr. Grey's work can be seen in the museum section of the Castlemaine Art Gallery. Green Mallee (*E. viridis*), Wallowa Wattle (*A. euthycarpa*) and Silky Bush-pea (*Pultenaea prostrata*) were noted in this area. In the township the Lemon Scented Gums lining the streets were showing off their beautiful pink trunks.

While lunching in the Botanic gardens at Inglewood we identified Brown-headed Honeyeaters moving about in a Stone Pine and a rare and endangered, grey coloured Streaked Wattle (*A. striata*). Mallee Wattle (*A. montana*) that is distinguished by its greener, shiny, multi-veined leaves also occurs here. After lunch we walked to the reservoir wall where we noted the Fleshy Mistletoe (*Amyema miraculosa*) growing on the Box Mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*). It is thought to always grow on other mistletoes. Walking around the reservoir we compared the three mallees – Green Mallee with narrow green leaves, the Blue Mallee (*E. polybractea*) with narrow bluish leaves and the

Bull Mallee (*E. behriana*) with broad green leaves. Totem Poles or Cross-leaf Honey-myrtle (*Melaleuca decussata*) were abundant. We also had good views of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, White-browed Babblers and a Little Eagle. And thanks to Lesley's efforts we saw a White-fronted Honeyeater near the end of our walk.

On the Laanecoorie Reservoir we saw Purple Swamphens, Large Black Cormorants, Coots, a Great Egret, a Darter, and Pelicans. (A full bird list is available on the club website.)

At the end of the day we felt we had all been rewarded for venturing out in the cold!

Geraldine Harris.

Peewees and the "Pandora"

(Where have Rita and Doug been? Read all about it here.)

Why the title? - well, Mudlarks seem to have done very well despite drought conditions and we saw them almost every day of the trip, sometimes scores of them; and the *Pandora* was Doug's reason for wanting to go to Townsville. The *Pandora* was wrecked off the coast before Queensland in the late 1700s before Queensland existed, and many of the relics and the main display and history are in the Museum of Tropical Queensland. I, of course, approved heartily - I wanted to visit the Town Common where the birds are!

I'm going to find it very hard to fit our six weeks away into a short article, but one of the things that was most noticeable this time was how few birds we saw flitting across the roads as we drove along. Last year it was noticeably worse than 2001 and 2002, but this year, even the BBBs - crow and raven species - seemed to be generally down in numbers. Of course, after rain in almost all the areas we visited, there is at least a flush of green over the ground - even the "dead" Mulgas near Eulo are sprouting young leaves, reminding me of willows in Spring. My theory that many Australian Natives benefit from drought in the long run seems to be justified going by the number of young eucalypts, mulgas and other wattles in particular.

Despite what I've said about bird numbers, I still came home with a list of over 170 species, many of which I had never seen before. The outstanding areas made their mark for different reasons. Around Griffith we saw a great flock of Cockatiels, and the highest numbers of Mudlarks. Apostlebirds were in flocks of well over twelve; many flocks would have contained upwards of 40 birds and the largest I counted was about 60.

Morning tea on the Lagoon (too wet to go into Gum Swamp) at Forbes yielded 11 species in just the 15 minutes we were there.

We spent 3 nights at Goondiwindi, and explored such places as the River Walk where I spotted three Nankeen Night Herons across the river and Royal Spoonbills, among many others. The Botanical Gardens which have been planted with various native habitats in mind, yielded 16 species, plus several LBJs! Later we went out to the Water Park which is a recreation area on a Billabong. There were hundreds of Little Corellas there and little else, but as I looked through the binocs at the moon which was well above the horizon in the late afternoon I spotted two very interesting things - Pelicans soaring hundreds of feet up, and, as I learned on the news that evening, Jupiter just near the moon.

Our time with Simon and Andrea (grandson and his wife for those who don't know) in Brisbane was a most enjoyable time. We saw Peregrine Falcons and Brahminy Kites near the Art Gallery, and next day Simon took us out to the Walking Track, which includes a boardwalk through Mangroves, in the Morton Bay National Park at Winnum. Here we added Tawny Grass-bird, Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Golden-headed Cisticola, Red-backed Wrens, Avocets, Black-winged Stilts, Mangrove Kingfisher, Mangrove Gerygone and Gull-billed Terns to the list. Apart from the Kingfisher we saw among the Mangroves themselves, there were several out on the mud flats apparently feeding. We had a list of 29 identified birds for that day, but that was mainly thanks to Simon's knowledge and spotting ability!

We spent a few hours out at Townsville Town Common on one occasion and called in again the morning we left, and despite the fact that most of the waterholes are dry we saw a flock of 40 Brolgas, plus a few stray families, Jabirus, Forest and Little Kingfishers, Pied Stilts, Bee-eaters, Nutmeg Manikins, a Blue-winged Kookaburra, Yellow, Brown and Black-chinned Honeyeaters, an Intermediate Egret, a Reef Heron (white phase), an Oriental and a Horsfields Cuckoo, and many more including, of course, Scrub Turkeys.

Because there were two big Rugby matches on, and the Show, we couldn't get any more accommodation in Townsville, and were to head for Charters Towers, but we decided we would go up to Paluma NP first. We wound our way up into the mountains and into the rainforest from the very flat plain with its Savannah Woodland and Sugar Cane. I was dreaming of all these rainforest birds I was going to see, but I only saw four species to identify on the walking track and lookout. First, of course, were Scrub Turkeys, but in the forest we saw the Grey-headed Robin, when we got back to the lookout there was a Pale-yellow Robin with its yellow legs, sitting on the barrier, and Doug spotted a female Victoria Rifle-bird in one of the trees at the edge of the picnic area, only about 10 metres away! She stayed there feeding for a minute or two, giving me plenty of time to have a good look, and identify her positively. At the swimming area earlier we saw the heart stopping beauty of a Ulysses Butterfly flashing its iridescent blue wings as it flew among the bushes and settled only a couple of metres away.

The highlight of the whole trip came because the only accommodation we could get near Paluma was at Ingham, and there at the Caravan Park I met a woman to whom I'd been talking the day before on Castle Hill in Townsville. She knew my interest in birds and asked me if I'd come up to visit the Tyto Wetlands. I hadn't even heard of them, but we soon had booked in for another night, and how glad we both were that we did. I was talking to Shirley Parnaby after I got home, and her comment about them was that they were a mini-Kakadu, and I think that is a good description. We spent hours out there, going back again in the evening in the hope of seeing the Grass Owls after which the reserve is named. I came away with a list of 35 birds. Some of the special ones were Spangled Drongo, Pheasant Coucal, Noisy Friarbird, Satin Flycatcher (male and female), Crimson Finch (and there were about 30 behind our unit at the caravan park), Magpie Geese, Darter, Sunbirds, Tawny Grassbird, Jacanas trotting over lily pads among the pink, red and blue flowers, Green Pygmy Geese, and in the evening Red-backed Wrens, including the handsome male. Sadly it didn't include the Grass Owls.

We'd seen a number of Pretty-face Wallabies during the day, but I lost count after 120 of them in the evening.

A different kind of experience happened when we stayed at Warrambra Farm Stay, between Injune and the turn-off to Carnarvon Gorge. We had decided to go out to the Morella Creek walking trail on the station itself, and made inquiries. In the morning Gary, the owner, decided that it was still too muddy for us to take our two wheel drive out to the start over 7.5 kms of farm track, so offered to take us in a 4x4. The 4x4 proved to be a Phalaris Ranger, a doorless, almost windscreen-less (I suspect Gary had added the windscreen himself), single cylindered, roaring glorified wheelbarrow cum golf buggy. There were no seat belts, but there were places to hang on to, which was just as well for Doug, who was nearly tipped out once as we crossed a creek where a rut proved to be a bit deeper than anticipated!

Gary dropped us off about 10 o'clock at the start of the walk and we followed a couple of the paths to aboriginal rock paintings, through Zamia Palms, Eucalypts, several different wattles, a couple of which were in flower, a pink Boronia, and up to a lookout point above a cliff, which gave a wonderful view across the plain to the mountains, and across to the dam where Gary had driven us across the bank so I could see the Cotton Pygmy Geese. There was quite a large flock of White-browed Woodswallows hawking just off the lookout. We descended by a rather steep path down the cliff face which at that point was probably only 30 metres at the most. Not far from where we reach the very muddy plain I spotted Variegated Fairy-wrens. There had actually only been a very few birds on the walk itself

We made our way to the dam after we'd finished the walk, and it was here that Gary collected us after we'd finished our lunch while watching such things as Freckled Ducks, Hoary-headed Grebes, Hardheads and a Darter. Over on the hill opposite a black pig was feeding. This fellow Gary informed us was Arnie, who'd lived in the area for years.

Gary decided to do something he doesn't usually do for tourists. As I was so interested in birds, and so is he, he took us past another dam to see more Cotton Pygmy Geese, swans, and grebes which he knew were on the other dam. I noticed that apart from taking us for a joyride, he was continually checking his stock which were mainly Brahmin cross. We were introduced to the "old Matrons" herd. They were all very laid back and reluctant to move out of the way as the Phalaris passed.

That evening I went for a walk over the paddock and came back just as the full moon was edging its way above the trees, and I called Doug out to see one of the most glorious moonrises I have ever seen. He got quite a good shot of it on video, so we will be able to enjoy it again and again.

We wended our way back home via Charters Towers, where there was a great number of Red Flying Foxes and lots of Figbirds in the Gardens and a family of four Bustards at the side of the road to the weir. We watched them for several minutes. There was a notice at the weir not to go too close to the water's edge because of crocodiles, but we didn't see any I'm glad to say!

Between Hungerford and Winton we saw several large flocks of Cockatiel, and I found Painted Firetails. I thought I had to be wrong until I met some keen birdos at Winton who confirmed that they had also seen Painted Firetails there. Sadly I didn't see the Flock Bronzewings that Simon assured me we should see just before Winton.

We visited Longreach and the Stockman's Hall of Fame, stayed a couple of nights at Barcaldine and finally got our tongues around the pronunciation of the name, and spent a most enjoyable morning exploring along the lagoon. At Charleville we visited the Parks and Wildlife place where the Bilbies are again being held, and were invited to go and see them in their sleeping quarters, and we got another good list of birds in the gardens, including Mallee Ringnecks, Pale-headed Rosellas and the pair of Spotted Bowerbirds.

Near Cunnamulla we saw several small flocks of Major Mitchell Cockatoos, but Nine Mile Bore was disappointing. The old tank is almost dry and silted up and a new one has been dug, and a round water trough installed, but we still only found one Grey Butcher-bird and one Magpie there. Despite the fact that there had been flood warnings for the Paroo and there was water in the river and some of the billabongs, other places had had very little rain or run off, and Nine Mile apparently is one of these places.

Going through my list I discovered that I had seen 23 new species of birds over the trip (well, I *identified* 23 new species). It was all very enjoyable and satisfying - and this is only the bare bones of the whole story!

Rita Mills

Nature Australia

For some years CFNC has paid for a subscription to this magazine for the Castlemaine Library. Having the magazine in the library means it is accessible to the general community as well as to CFNC members. I often borrow and read it.

It comes from the Australian Museum Trust in Sydney. There are four issues each year. Each issue includes letters, book reviews, and Nature Strips which has brief articles on items of natural history from around the world. There are several major articles in each issue across a wide range of topics. These are mostly about Australian species. An article which deals with a single species has a side panel giving the common and scientific names, identification, habitat and distribution of that species. There are some wonderful photographs accompanying the articles. The special nature photography pages are an added bonus.

I found the Autumn 2005 issue particularly interesting. It includes articles on the Bush Stone-curlew, Red-crowned Toadlets, Silverfish, Lichens in Antarctica, how snakes make and hear noises, and more. How Little Broad-nosed Bats have evolved ways of lasting through cold spells even though they usually roost under a flimsy sheet of bark fascinated me.

If you do not have a personal subscription to this magazine go into the Library and check it out. It is well worth a look and a read.

Lesley Perkins

News and Notes

Acacias of the Castlemaine District. The new edition of the Club's leaflet will be printed for the coming meeting. *Acacia sporadica*, the Sporadic Wattle has been added. See the front page for an illustration.

Swift Parrot May Survey Results. 577 Swift Parrots were recorded, 474 of these were in Victoria. 52 Regent Honeyeaters were recorded.

What's New on the Web? Excursion to Inglewood 9/7/05 with photos and complete Bird List

Swift Parrot Research. The presence of Swift Parrots in the district over winter could be an opportunity for some research into the ecology of these birds. Are you interested in taking part? What kind of project should we undertake? Contact Nigel Harland or Debbie Worland.

Bendigo FNC is celebrating its 60th anniversary at the end of August with a dinner on Wed Aug 31. See Ern Perkins for more information and a booking form.

Castlemaine FNC has its 30th anniversary early in 2006. That's half the Bendigo total. How should we celebrate this occasion?

Observations

- **Small bird's nest** found in ivy cuttings as they were about to be mulched. Lesley Perkins
- **First Golden Wattle** (*Acacia pycnantha*) seen in flower was in the pine plantation above Moonlight Flat in mid July. Also lots of Cranberry Heath (*Astroloma humifusum*) in flower through the bush. Wattle flowering has been very late this year. At the end of July only a few Cootamundra Wattles have flowered, and scattered Golden Wattles and Rough Wattles. Richard Piesse and others.
- **Kestral becomes a falcon!** Albert Golden has noticed that the bird in the Optus advertisement on TV changes from a sitting Kestrel to a flying Curved-winged Falcon. What does this tell us about the service – that it changes once it is in full-wing? Well spotted Albert!
- **Mid June Bird List** from Nola Cain.
 - Golf course - 3 Crested Pigeons, 12 Swift Parrots, 2 Eastern Rosellas, 6 Ravens, 1 Black-chinned Honeyeater, 12 Noisy Miners, 7 Wattlebirds.
 - Quince Tree - Yellow-tufted Honeyeater.
 - Saint Street - several New Holland Honeyeater feeding in my garden.
- **Black Shouldered Kites.** A group of four Black-shouldered Kites was seen near Mt Alexander. They are seldom seen here, and then only singly. Nigel Harland.
- **Birds seen on a walk** from the Garfield Wheel along Dirty Dicks Gully and Colles Road, and return along Forest Creek included a flock of Dusky Woodsallows, a Jacky Winter, Mistletoe Bird (on Wiry Mistletoe, growing on Blackwood) and a flock of 40 Magpies. Richard Piesse.

- **Black Cockatoos** were seen feeding on Willow Hakea fruit in Castlemaine. Anne Lee.
- **Hawk catches a mouse.** Jason Mills was driving to work in Castlemaine from Bendigo when he saw a mouse-sized animal 'bouncing' across the road. A hawk swooped down and grabbed it. The hawk was about cockatoo sized.

For your Diary

Thu. Aug 11. Local Wattles – Frances Cicotta. Presentation to Newstead Landcare Group. Visitors welcome. Newstead Community Centre, 8pm.

Fri Aug 19. BNPG Terrestrial Orchids. Cathy Power. Senior Citizens Building. Old High St, Golden Square. 7.30 specimens, 8pm for meeting.

Sun Aug 21. FOBIB Heritage Park south of Vaughan. Helge track to Italian Track. Take lunch. 10-11km. Richard Piesse 5472 3191

Aug 28 Friends of Kalimna park Working Bees. 4th Sunday of each month. Everyone welcome! Meet at the top of Lyttleton St. 9.30am. Bring own tools. Morning tea provided. Ph. 5472 5343

Sept 30 –Oct 7 Birds Australia Congress - Bendigo. Contact, C Morris. Ph. 9885 4221.

Oct 24-28 Oct. Box Ironbark Ecology Course at Nagambie. Cost \$1072, which includes accommodation and meals. See Ern Perkins for information and booking form. Applications close 31 Aug.

Articles Welcome-Articles, reports and observations can be left at Tonks Bros. in Barkers St. or sent to Geraldine Harris, P.O.Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450. Ph. 5474 2244, or gedharris@castlemaine.net Please submit articles by the fourth Thursday of the month.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

Subscriptions for 2005

Ordinary membership: Single \$22, Family \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19, Family \$24

The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist*.

2005 Committee

Rita Mills (Pres).....Ph. 5472 4553

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Ern Perkins (Web).....Ph. 5472 3124

Nigel Harland.....Ph. 5474 8246

Geraldine Harris (Ed).....Ph. 5474 2244

George Broadway (Sec)..Ph. 5472 2513

Richard Piesse.....Ph.5472 3191

Athol Dorman.....Ph. 5472 4429

Chris MorrisPh. 9885 4221

Acting Ed (Aug) Ern Perkins.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme. August 2005

General meetings (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Excursions (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the carpark opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings- fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at 27 Doveton Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Visitors are welcome to attend Club meetings and outings.

Sat 6 Aug. Swift Parrot survey day 1. We take part in the twice-yearly Swift parrot survey. Meet opp Motel in Duke St at 8.00 am. Contact: Ern Perkins.

Sun 7 Aug: Swift parrot Survey day 2. Search at the golf course, Newstead and Mia Mia Rd. Contact Debbie Worand for times and meeting place.

Wed 10 Aug. Planting in the Botanic Gardens. Entrance opposite Burnett Road. 9am. Wear sturdy footwear, gloves, hat etc. BYO morning tea. We will be planting on the slope facing the creek, where broom has been pulled over the past few years.

Fri 12 Aug. Fire Management Planning. Kane Weeks, Ranger in charge of Fire and Environmental Programmes in the Northern Goldfields. 8 pm UCA hall.

Sat 13 Aug. Boundaries of Castlemaine. 5 km walk. Leader: E. Perkins, Ph 5472 3124. Depart from carpark opp. motel in Duke Street at 1.30 pm sharp. Carry afternoon tea. We walk the historic (1850s) boundary of Castlemaine.

Thu 25 Aug. Annual Broom Pull. Meet at the Mary St./Froomes Rd. Corner at 9am. Wear sturdy footwear, gloves, hat etc. BYO drinks and morning tea.

Fri 9 Sept. The Alpine National Park. Phil Ingamells. Phil is the Alpine Grazing Campaigner with the Victorian National Parks Association, and a former member of the CFNC. UCA hall at 8.00 pm.

Sat 10 Sept. Mandurang – Bendigo National Park. Leaders: R. Piesse/ R. Mills. Depart from carpark opp. motel in Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp.

Wed 14, 21, 28. Sept. Wednesday Evening Wildflower Walks. All these walks depart at 4pm from carpark, Duke St. Leaders wanted - Geraldine Ph 54742244.

Fri 14 Oct. The Box-Ironbark Forests. Ern Perkins. UCA at 8pm.

Sat 15 Oct -Sun 16 Oct. Three excursions with the Ringwood FNC. All are subject to revision, so check the October newsletter.

- Sat am. Walk in Muckleford Forest to the Red White and Blue Mine.

- Sat pm. The Monk, Fryerstown and Vaughan.

- Sun am and pm. Elphinstone and Taradale.

Fri 11 Nov. November meeting.

Fri 9 Dec. Members night. 8 pm at UCA hall.